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HAWAII FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

3375 Koapaka Street, Suite H425
Honolulu, Hawaii 96819-1869

December 18, 2003

Mr. Michael K. Powell, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Docket: 02-55

Dear Chairman Powell:

Last week, a leadership summit meeting in Washington was convened with more than 150 of my colleagues from around the country. We are united on one of the most pressing issues the fire service faces today, that of public safety interference at 800 MHz. In these times of heightened security and alert, our first responders need the support of the FCC in resolving this critical issue. Highly reliable communications for public safety professionals save lives that cannot be disputed.

Interference in the 800 MHz band can impede the fire fighter on the front line of defense and the chain of decision-makers assisting in an emergency situation. In fact, it is estimated that public safety agencies will experience interference at more than 350 locations this year--the highest single-year total to date. The trend is alarming and foreshadows the day when communications are interrupted during a future catastrophic event.

Regrettably, many wireless carriers do not recognize 800 MHz interference as a serious problem. Some that do acknowledge the problem favor a "patch and fix" solution whereby interference is dealt with after the problem occurs. Though this approach may work well in other settings, it is wholly unacceptable when it comes to public safety. That is why I support the proposed realignment of the spectrum known as the Consensus Plan--the only solution supported by all the major public safety organizations. We would not think of equipping our fire fighters with gear that has the potential to fail, and we cannot endanger the lives of fire fighters and the public with a plan that does not proactively address this problem. We cannot afford a reactive plan that places our members and the public at risk.

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In a nutshell, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Although the FCC may not have foreseen the issue of interference when originally dividing the 800 MHz band, the Consensus Plan offers a reasonable solution to this problem. The Consensus Plan, by way of spectrum reallocation at no cost to taxpayers, is the solution that would prevent radio interference before problems occur. In addition, the Plan assures that public safety entities are provided the bandwidth necessary for growth in the future, while allowing the private sector dedicated areas for their own future development.

Because I am the President of the Hawaii Fire Chiefs Association whose membership is comprised of all the Fire Chiefs throughout the State of Hawaii who are responsible for the protection of life and property, I take this issue quite seriously. Though there are vested interests on all sides of this issue, in my opinion, this is, above all else, a matter of protecting the public. This is my job and I believe the Consensus Plan offers the best solution.

I urge you and the FCC to adopt the Consensus Plan and to expedite implementation as quickly as possible. If you believe it would be of use, I am happy to discuss this matter with you at a time of mutual convenience.

Sincerely,



ALVIN K. TOMITA
President

AKT:cn

cc: The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
The Honorable Neil Abercrombie
The Honorable Ed Case
FCC Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy
FCC Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps
FCC Commissioner Kevin J. Martin
FCC Secretary Marlene H. Dortch